39: Bernatzik--460 E-5 (1936-1937) 1947 A01 Thailand

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AKha A04
MiaoAE5

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Chapter 17

Means of Subsistence

a) Gathering

M 222 After the harvest the Meau regularly gather wild roots, tubers, and fruits. Beyond this time gathering is done only M [731] occasionally, for instance, on hunting expeditions or during migrations. In times of crop failures, however, gathering plays an important role and may even become a necessity A 222 for survival. Among the Akha in Thailand, who live under absolutely the same climatic conditions and whose diet, in [262] accordance with their generally greater primitiveness, is less varied than that of the Meau, gathering plays at least an [731] equally important role in times of famine. In years of abundance, on the other hand, it is likewise practiced regularly only after the harvest, but otherwise only occasionally.

b) Hunting

M 224 Hunting is of much greater significance than gathering among the Meau and among the Akha. The Meau are ex- A [224] cellent observers, have presence of mind, and are animated by a burning passion for the hunt. Since, in addition, they M [151] are excellent marksmen and have great patience and endurance, they have all the qualifications for good hunters.

[184] With regard to the Meau in Indochina, who, of course, are in a far better position economically than the mountain peoples on the poor soil in northern Thailand, hunting seems to be less important. Lajonquière (1) writes, for instance:

1. II, p. 311.

M [411] "Hunting is not practiced as a regular means of subsistence [171] but they are nevertheless skilled hunters. They use a gun [389] similar to the one of the 'Man,' which, /340/ like the powder, they make themselves."

/389 cont./

411 loaded. One presses the whole down firmly with a plug of scraped bamboo and immediately before firing the shot lets two more of these lead cylinders serving as bullets slide loosely into the barrel. The shot is released by the lock which is [237] glued with beeswax to the pistol stock (a) and secured there with rings of iron or sheet silver (g). The cocked lock is shown in Fig. 307; the way it operates is explained by Fig. 308.

In shooting, the trigger (e) is pressed to the left. The pressure overcomes the force of the counterspring (a); the full cock (f) is released. As a result, the cocking spring (k) presses against the hammer (b), in the upper end of which a flint is clamped (b 1). The hammer flies forward; the flint hits the snap (c), which springs back and lays open the powder pan (Pf). The touchhole (z) runs into the powder pan and connects it with the interior of the barrel. Through the striking of the flint on the snap, a spark is produced which sets fire to the powder in the pan. The explosion instantly runs through the touchhole, ignites the propellant in the interior of the barrel, and the bullets are hurled out of the barrel (i).

It was astonishing for me to observe the relatively great efficiency. At a distance of 120 meters the marksman with each shot hit a target 20 centimeters long and 15 centimeters wide, piercing a board of soft wood two centimeters thick.

•389 The Meau even produce for themselves the black powder for the guns, made out of charcoal, sulphur, and saltpeter. [237] Bat excrement serves to provide the latter. A bamboo tube is split into halves and /390/ /Figs. 309-314 appear here/ the overlapping pieces are put on the ground. The spaces in between are covered with banana leaves and the vessel is filled with old /Fig. 315 appears here/ bat excrement and with the earth that lay underneath it. Then water is poured on it, and the liquid is allowed to run off slowly, is collected in a suitable vessel, and is dried by evaporation in iron pans. To one part of the saltpeter thus obtained, one takes half a [439] part of charcoal and a twelfth part of the sulphur purchased from the Chinese traders, beats up the mixture with the addition of some water, and kneads it vigorously in order to obtain a uniform blend. This moist paste of powder is placed in an

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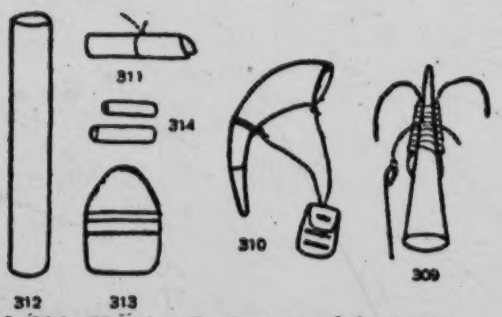

Figs. 309-314. Hunting Equipment of the Meau.

Figs. 309-311. Powder containers: Fig. 309, copper powder-horn, on which hangs the iron needle for cutting through the powder channel, 1/5 nat. size; Fig. 310, powder horn (goat horn) set with copper bands and with copper rings for the attachment of the carrying cord, end piece can be removed, 1/13 nat. size; Fig. 311, bamboo container for gunpowder, 1/10 nat. size. Fig. 312. Ramrod of iron, 1/22 nat. size. Fig. 313. Cloth bullet-pouch, 1/20 nat. size, is also visible in Fig. 310, hung on the powder horn. Fig. 314. Iron bullets, about 1/2-1/8 nat. size.

[237]

Fig. 315
Wooden peg of the Meau for pounding gunpowder, 1/18 nat. size.

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389 iron pan slightly warmed over an open fire, allowed to dry, and the now firm mass is pounded to powder with the help of a wooden peg (Fig. 315).

411 Since there are only a few armorers among the Meau and
[326] the raw material for making guns must be obtained from the
[439] Chinese trader, this weapon is not as generally /391/ widespread by far as the crossbow (Ills. 79 and 93),[1] which the Meau are able to manage expertly.

The crossbow of the Meau is made very solidly out of hard wood and has the form shown in Fig. 317. It consists of a stock (a) with a guide groove (d) for the arrow, a bow of hardwood (b), and a recessed trigger (c) with a catch (e). The size of the crossbow varies and is regulated by the size and strength of the owner. The two most common kinds of trigger are represented by Figs. 316 and 318. The bowstring (f) con-
[283] sists of rattan fibers twisted together. The cross-section of the arrow shaft (Fig. 319) is round and measures about four millimeters. The feathering, folded strips of bamboo ten to twelve millimeters wide, is clamped into the split part of the shaft and secured by a tight lashing. /Figs. 316-320 appear here./

/392/ The accuracy of such a crossbow is only half as
[224] great as that of the gun, as is its penetrating power. Since the crossbow arrows (Figs. 319 and 320) are strongly poisoned, however, and in the primeval forest shooting is done only at short range, large game, indeed, even pachyderms, are killed with this weapon by the Meau.

Certain tribes must have used powerful crossbows in war.
[175] The old Chinese literature, for instance, mentions crossbows which had to be cocked by three men. Poisoned arrows were shot with such crossbows (1). At that time mighty bows were

1. Eberhard, II, p. 259.

also still in use, which probably were superseded by the crossbow at a very early date.

1 [See cat 116, pp 576 + 643 - ANALYST]